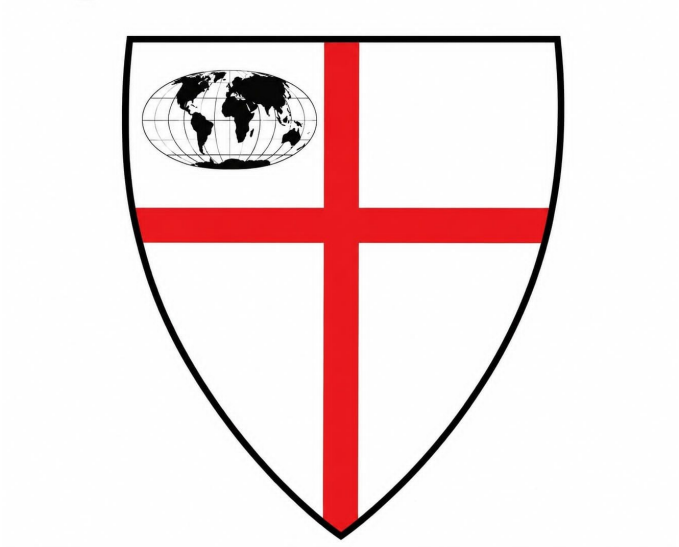
Seed, Yeast, Pearl:
Shrub, Bread, Kingdom

Anglican Church International



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The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland, Ph.D. LPC-S, LADAC, AADC, CCDP-D, IAADC, ICCDP-D

Founding Bishop
Anglican Church International

Owner
Holland Counseling of the Ozarks, LLC

Abstract

This reflection on the Gospel appointed for Proper 12, Year A, reads Matthew 13:31–33 and 13:44–52 as a single staged progression from hidden potency to manifest actualization. The three parables — mustard seed, leaven, and pearl of great price — are treated not as three angles on one theological reality but as three ascending stages of one sanctifying movement: seed becomes shrub in the individual soul, yeast becomes bread through the sanctified person's action in the world, and pearl becomes Kingdom manifest in the communion of sanctified persons united in the Spirit. The Preface states three theses drawn from this reading, sets alongside them the received scholarly reading of the parables from The Oxford Bible Commentary, and grounds the whole argument in the ontological guarantee of Romans 8:38–39 that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ. The Body then elaborates the three theses, showing how the sanctified person becomes a sure foundation for others, how the treasure of that mutual foundation is the joy of Heaven here and now, and how the Kingdom springs forth in the field of the world through the ministry of the Church. The reflection closes with a collect drawn from the Proper 12 Collect of the Day, asking that we so pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal, and that His Eternal Kingdom be brought to all His creation.

Abstract by

Perplexity Computer

in conversation with The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland

26 July 2026

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Preface

Epistle — Romans 8:38–39

> "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39, NRSV).
>
> One point Paul is making here seems clear and it is this: **NOTHING can separate us from God's love for us in Christ!**

Gospel — Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52 (Theses)

A note on the Gospel reading for today:

When Christ grows in us by His Spirit that "helps us in our weakness [does for us what we cannot do for ourselves by our willpower alone]," we, the Body of Christ in the world, which is to say His Eternal Kingdom, becomes the greatest of shrubs in which all of God's creation can build a nest, find a home.

We [yeast] become leavened being mixed with flour through our actions of following Christ. And thus we become the bread of life, sustenance from which all His creation can find sustenance. And in so becoming we proclaim the Word, which is Christ, to all of God's creation.

In so doing we find treasure in the field that, collectively, is us that we all seek to obtain, the pearl, namely, His Word, growing in each of us, which, in the unity of His Spirit becomes His Kingdom here and now.

According to the Oxford Bible Commentary

"The parable of the mustard seed … teaches that a humble beginning is not inconsistent with a great and glorious destiny. … Our parable implicitly sets reality and hope side by side and offers that the grand end is in the mundane beginning. Just as the seed produces the tree, so that which is inconspicuously present in Jesus' ministry [in us and thus our ministry] will become the universal reign of God" (Barton and Muddiman 862).

"The introduction to the parable of the leaven (v. 33) resembles the introduction to the parable of the mustard seed, and both parables tell of a small, hidden thing that becomes large through an organic process. These similarities signal an identity of theme. Both teach that the coming of the Kingdom begins not with a grand spectacle but a hidden presence [the hidden presence of the Word in us, which, through Christ's Spirit in us, is made known to all we encounter by our being the Image in which we are created — Christian]" (Barton and Muddiman 862).

"The first two parables (vv. 44–6) concern the finding of the kingdom (represented by the treasure and the pearl) and doing everything to obtain it. The point is that although the kingdom [is] hidden (cf. 13:31–33) it can be found; and when it is, one should make every sacrifice to obtain it" (Barton and Muddiman 862).

Body

In the Gospel for last week we discovered what the result of the Word growing in us is. We were told the Son of Man sows good seed (children of God) in the field (the world) which grows to be wheat, and thus the bread of life, others sure foundation.

When we make our lives good soil the Word grows in us and sustains us and transforms us into children of God, good seed in the field of the world. And when we gain sustenance and grow by walking in the light of Christ, serving others as Christ serves us, we become the vehicles through which Christ is the bread of life for others, others' sure foundation.

In the Gospel for today we are told what the result of Christ's being others sure foundation through us is. It is the growth of the church, Christ's body here and now.

> "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches" (Matthew 13:31–32, NRSV).

So, I have been told a mustard seed is not the smallest of seeds, it does not grow into a great bush, and it is not a nest for birds and the people to whom Jesus was speaking would have known this. I have also been told that a mustard seed is a small seed which can grow into a bush. Regardless, which is to say that it does not matter which version is correct, Jesus' saying this would have got people's attention so that they might get the point, which, at least in part, is that great things can come from humble beginnings. The Son of Man sows in the field (the world) a mustard seed (the Word in a child of God) — the smallest of seeds which grows into the greatest of shrubs — one cannot help but think that we are capable of more good than we realize — in

which others can build their nest — on the branches. A child of God being a sure foundation to another. What is the reaction?

> "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44, NRSV).

Both the joy of being a sure foundation for another and the joy of being provided a sure foundation are transforming in that in being and being provided a foundation we discover a treasure that is heaven here and now — the act of being and being provided a foundation — and we naturally respond by selling all that we have, literally, for Heaven's sake. And the Son of Man, through the one, plants Himself in the other, and the church — the body of Christ here and now — grows.

The Son of Man, then, sows in the field (the world) mustard seeds (children of God) — the smallest of seeds which grows into the greatest of shrubs — (the church) in which others can build their nest — and, the kingdom of God springs forth in the field of the world, here and now. By each act of Christ being the sure foundation for all God's creation **through us**, **His Church**, the Kingdom of God is made known, and brought to, all God's creation. This is our mission, our ministry, the ministry of the Church, to bring the kingdom of God to all we encounter.

Thus united in His Kingdom, nothing can separate us from the love of God in our lord and Savior Christ Jesus. Saint Paul tells us: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39, NRSV).

Prayer

Let us pray,

> As we go about our week, may God increase and multiply upon us His mercy; that, with Him as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal that we might bring His Eternal Kingdom to all His creation, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

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